



COMMUNITY HEALTH NURSES ARE COMMUNITY BASED AT LAST: TRANSFORMING CHN INTO CHO IN NKWANTA DISTRICT

Started in 1998, the Community-based Health and Planning Services (CHPS) Initiative in the Nkwanta District, Volta Region, represents a response to the policy goal of the Ministry of Health/Ghana Health Service to provide adequate, efficient and equitable Primary Health Care to all Ghanaians. One key achievement of the programme is demonstration of the efficient use of scarce human resources for reaching the unreachable with basic health care services, such as maternal and child health, immunization against childhood diseases, family planning, school health, treatment of minor ailments, and health promotion and education.



Community-constructed
CHC at Bonakye zone

CHPS is a process of strategic planning and implementation of primary health care activities within a community with the full involvement and participation of community members.

CHPS grew out of the experiences of the Community Health and Family Planning Project (CHFP) of the Navrongo Health Research Centre (NHRC) in the Upper East Region. The Navrongo service model emphasizes preventive health care and education through effective communication and community mobilization. The programme involves reorienting Community Health Nurses, and rechristening them

“Community Health Officers” (CHO). The new title provides a basis for community introduction activities for emphasizing their new role and capabilities as community-based health care workers. Each CHO is based at a residence and clinic known as a Community Health Compound (CHC) which is constructed and continually maintained mainly through community effort. The CHC is both a residence and a clinic. The CHO also conducts outreach services to the communities within her catchment area with the aid of a motorbike.

The Nkwanta District Health Administration has a total of 17 Community Health Nurses. Six are functioning in the CHPS programme, with one stationed in each CHPS implementation zone. These six CHO together provide comprehensive primary healthcare services to 23.2 percent of the people in the district who would otherwise not have access to any health facility.



CHC at Bontibor zone

These “most-deprived-of-the-deprived” residents live in a total of 42 out of the 217 communities in the district. The programme so far has achieved significant improvement in some health indicators. Coverage in the immunization against vaccine-preventable diseases has improved: BCG increased from 30.5 percent to 78.9 percent; measles from 27.7 percent to 58.4

percent; and DPT from 18.6 percent to 57.1 percent. During this period reported cases of measles reduced from 130 to 42.



Asante Akim North DHMT on a study tour

Plans are underway to create five more CHPS implementation zones since many more communities in the district lack access to health facilities. When these new zones are created, an additional 15.1 percent of the people in the district, occupying 19 more-deprived communities, will have these basic health services. This will require reorienting and deploying only five more Community Health Nurses.

Each CHPS zone is manned by one CHO. On the average, one CHO caters for 4250 people and 7 communities. With each CHC well equipped for carrying out its functions there has been a dramatic

increase in the utilization of services such as supervised deliveries, family planning, child welfare clinics, immunization, and health education. Attendance is high as clients come to the CHC for services at all hours and every day of the week—they are received with service and a smile. This attention is enhanced greatly by the professionalism, devotion and commitment of CHO. Their knowledge of the sociocultural matrix, and their ability to apply this knowledge in their day-to-day interactions with their clients is commendable.

Community participation has also been encouraging. Each CHO has one or more volunteers amongst the people who assist in her daily work.



Mr. Thomas Azongo conducting a focus group discussion on community participation in the CHPS Programme

Comments? Opinions? Suggestions? Please share your local experiences by writing to:

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This publication was made possible through support provided by the Office of Population, Bureau for Global Programs, Field Support & Research, U.S. Agency for International Development, under the terms of Award No. HRN-A-00-99-00010. The opinions expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Agency for International Development.